DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 081 299 FL 004 813

AUTHOR Taylor, Harvey M.
TITLE Developing Student Observational Skills: Using Visual Materials.
PUB DATE 23 Nov 73
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented Japanese Language Teaching Session of the Association of Teachers of Japanese, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages meeting, Boston, Mass., November 23, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; Cultural Enrichment; *Educational Experiments; Foreign Culture; *Media Research; *Modern Languages

ABSTRACT

Observations from a study which sought to measure both the effect of television viewing on cultural bias and awareness and also the Hawthorne effect upon an experimental group are compiled in this report. (The Hawthorne effect is a measurable improvement normally shown in any group of subjects who know they are taking part in an experiment.) Description of the experimental procedures and student observations are contained in the report. (RL)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 081299

# DEVELOPING STUDENT OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS: USING VISUAL MATERIALS*

Harvey M. Taylor (University of Hawaii)

This paper is primarily a report of unexpected benefits resulting from an experiment. The techniques that produced these benefits are so simple that it seems to me that someone else must have used these techniques somewhere else before, but so far I have not seen it reported anywhere.

During the Spring, 1973 semester at the University of Hawaii, I was involved in an experiment to test the effectiveness of a set of videotaped Japanese language-and-culture teaching lessons (titled "Japanese Language Situations") we have developed. About one third of the 400 students enrolled in our beginning Japanese 101 classes viewed these videotaped lessons in addition to doing the regular course work. Another third who did only the regular course work served as our control group. The remaining third are the ones involved in what I am reporting here.

This group was needed to measure both the effect of TV viewing and also the "Hawthorne effect" upon the experimental group of students. (The Hawthorne effect is the measurable improvement normally shown in any group of subjects who know they are taking part in an experiment.) In order for our basic experiment to be reasonably valid, we needed to know if changes in the experimental group's performance would be the result of the actual content of the videotaped programs or whether such

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

FL 004 813

* To be read at the Japanese Language Teaching session of the Association of Teachers of Japanese, ACTFL meeting, Boston, November 23, 1973.

changes were simply the result of the fact that these students were participating in an experiment which involved viewing TV as part of their Japanese language study. We, therefore, needed a TV-control group made up of students who would do the regular class work and who would also watch TV, but not watch the particular TV programs being tested.

Because we had neither the time nor separate TV viewing facilities, we were unable to provide this TV-control group with an alternate Japanese language-teaching TV program to watch. Therefore, I assigned them to watch any Japanese TV program they could at home. (In Honolulu we have telecasting in Japanese of Japanese programs and movies every evening on Channel 13. A few such programs have English subtitles, but most of them are completely in Japanese.)

The students were supposed to view 20 minutes of Japanese TV per week and to turn in a weekly written Japanese "Culture Report." This report was to contain the title of the program, the date and time it was watched, and a two-or-three sentence notation in English of things they observed that appeared to them to be "Japanesey." This was explained to be not only the ways the people acted, but also how they dressed, ate, drank, and traveled, what their houses, offices and schools looked like, etc.

My original purpose in assigning the report was to use it only as a check to be sure the students did watch something on

Japanese TV. I had not really expected them to learn anything very profitable from this. Each week the teachers collected and passed the student written reports on to me; I scanned them hurriedly at first and added comments such as "good observations" or "look more carefully next time" to let the students know that someone was actually checking up on them.

Initially, most students limited their comments to the bowing, the tatami floors, the shoji doors, and the women's kimonos they saw. My comments on these first papers were nearly as superficial. But by the time of the second and third reports, a few students were looking deeper, and their comments were beginning to reflect a developing ability to observe new points in Japanese culture. I was impressed, and from then on copied down every new point from each report that was turned in. These points became the data for this paper.

As an example, here are two of the earliest reports just as they came to me:

1. Tokubetsu kidoo sosatai -- police story. 7 PM Tuesday. Last night's program didn't show much actions [sic] that are really 'Japanesey.' However, it seems that Japanese men wear black suits to a wedding ceremony and reception. Although some women wore colorful kimonos, other women had black dresses on. I don't know why this is so, since it should be a very happy event.

2. The program viewed was 'Daichushingura,' a samurai adventure televised on Wednesday, January 31 at 9:00 p.m. One of the behavior patterns observed applied to instances when a person of inferior rank spoke to a superior--for example, merchants discussing business with the clan's deputy chief. The person of lower rank would kneel, bend his body forward, and place both palms on the floor. He would remain in such a position for most of the interview. The same position was also used by a father--grateful to a samurai for saving his son's life--when he offered his thanks. Apparently, this bowed, almost subservient position is a signal of respect and humility.

It will be evident that neither of these students was really sure what the behavior he was reporting here meant; however, he did think it was unusual and tried to interpret it--but in American cultural terms: (1) black clothing equals sorrow and mourning in America, so are inappropriate at a wedding, and (2) kneeling is an unusual, degrading, humiliating position for an American--not one for showing thanks.

I had encouraged the individual teachers to read over their own students' comments and use them as springboards for short cultural discussions in their language classes. Otherwise, students such as these two might never discover that

black is not the Japanese color of mourning or that kneeling and bowing primarily show respect for the other person, rather than the humiliation of the person using this sort of bow. Not all teachers felt they could afford the time for such discussion.

Now I want to move on to a number of the items reported by the students. Additional items are included in the Appendix. Since these students had not learned these points from their teachers, since they probably had not read about them elsewhere, and since no language-class time was taken to present these points, it is evident that these students, by themsleves, did learn to observe scores of things done by the Japanese. Of even greater significance is that they gained a new skill which they will not likely lose--the skill to notice items in another culture and to try to understand what these things mean in the context in which they occur. Of course, not every student noticed every item listed--some didn't even cooperate in the assignment.

Besides the definite benefit these students received from this observation assignment, we as teachers of Japanese can benefit by finding out which items stood out as "unusual" or "different" enough to catch the attention and interest of these Americans. It is possible that these are some of the items we could profitably include in our teaching of Japanese culture. The important thing here is not whether the students

commented upon items which are representative of past or present Japan. The important thing is that these items were different enough to be noticed by American students who observe Japanese filmed situations, even when they do not know the language; the fact that these particular items were noticed should warn us teachers not to overlook this cultural aspect of Japanese language teaching.

Before we do look at the summarized items, one note is needed. Not all of the items were actually observed from TV programs. A few students said they lived in areas where Channel 13 cannot be received. I suggested that they go to one of the commercial movies at a local Japanese theater or to the up-coming Kabuki performance (Narukami) at the University, or else look through some Japanese comic books to see if they could find anything for their "culture reports." Their observations from the movies and the Kabuki performance are included here; those from comic books are listed separately in the Appendix.

Those who watched samurai programs picked up a number of historical or out-of-date customs. Those who watched programs or movies with English subtitles were able to pick up more of the plot's inter-personal involvements than the others were. (The main drawback to the use of these subtitled programs is that the observer tends to become involved in the plot and forgets to look for cultural points until the plot thins or the program ends.)

I have divided the observations arbitrarily into categories solely for convenience in presentation here. I have also shortened the students' original wordings where possible, but have tried not to change the prejudice, amusement, or surprise that show up in some of their comments.

Language-related observations

Japanese are soft-spoken.

Girls use polite "half-whispers."

Japanese have poor eye contact when being spoken to at close range.

If there is eye contact, the face is turned slightly away.

Women giggle when nervous and embarrassed.

They giggle a lot and show teethy smiles.

Pointing to the nose indicates himself.

Lots of noises made when listening to someone, such as "ah, eh, ha-ha-ha."

English words are inserted into songs and talk on TV variety shows.

Housing

Doors slide, aren't hinged.

Short, square cloths are hung over doorways.

Slippers are used only in the kitchen and hallway.

Rooms are uncluttered, neat.

There are no tables, chairs, or beds.

Travel and transportation

They drive on the left side of the street.

Drivers are reckless.

Worship

The ashes urn is treated as a living human being.

They pray before a picture, with a candle, beads, and incense.

Walking and standing

Men stand with thumbs in their belts, not in their pockets.

The man precedes the woman, even when there is room to walk abreast.

Girls, even teenagers, hold hands (and may also lock elbows).

Girls stand closer together than American girls.

Sitting

On floor cushions

The guest sits at a distance from the host until invited closer.

Personal appearance

Japanese are neatly groomed.

Men wear only white, not colored, dress shirts.

Women wear their hair "up" with a kimono.

Men don't wear rings.

Sake drinking

They drink sake with fingers extended, not curled around the cup.

They act silly when they get drunk.

Eating

Noisy with their mouths.

Many small dishes at a meal.

They eat seaweed.

A woman kneels down outside the door, slides the door open, sets her food tray on the floor inside, crawls through, shuts the door, picks up the tray, walks to the table, kneels again, serves (even reaches in front of people to put dishes down).

Gestures

Gestures are economical (not many).

The "no" hand signal looks like waving gnats away from nose or face.

Calling puppies with palm up, all fingers pulling in.

Nose picking with thumb and middle finger inside each nostril.

The little finger stuck out means "women."

A circle with the thumb and finger means "money."

Receiving money with both hands, then lift it till it touches forehead.

Japanese do head-bobbing when talking like dolls with heads on springs.

Miscellaneous observations

Cigarettes held between thumb and finger tips.

Abacus used for arithmetic.

Teenagers dance alone in public places, with expressionless faces.

The mother sets the "family tone."

Lovers' emotional hugging is more of a wild grab at each other.

Admittedly, many of the things these students observed are of trivial importance when compared with other things that could have been observed if the students had happened to be watching either different programs or teacher-chosen materials. Again, the point of this paper is not what was observed, but the facts (1) that something new was observed and (2) that the observational skills of at least some of the students improved rapidly during just one semester of Japanese language study because of this assignment. This was essentially a self-instructional approach which would need only some teacher assistance (in explaining non-obvious implications) to make it maximally useful.

A number of further ideas come to mind for developing student observational skills with the use of visual materials in locations without the wealth of Japanese TV programs and movies found in Hawaii. The following suggestions may be applicable elsewhere:

1) Show a short Japanese cultural film (or a brief portion of a longer one) with the sound track turned OFF; have students note down their cultural observations as fast as they can while watching. Discuss these together; then re-show the film, possibly with the sound turned up. (Silent pictures, however, allow the mind to focus on the actions and setting

rather than on the plot.) If class time is too precious for films, do the showing at a Japanese club meeting or in an out-of-class, lab-type situation. If equipment is available, student self-operated 8mm film loops could be used to show clips of especially clear and valuable dramatic situations. Video-cassettes are also ideally suited for making this entirely self-instructional.

2) A set of slides taken from such films or even from post cards, travel posters, books, or other visuals could be similarly used. The point is for the student to be forced to look and decide what is worth noting down. Most existing films and slide sets tell the student what is being illustrated; his own observational skills are not developed.

3) Use Japanese comics. Japanese cartoons and comic books have a syle of drawing all their own, which may in itself be of interest to Japanese language learners. Of greater use-fulness, however, are the immense number of cultural items which an observant student can pick out of such drawings--house types and furnishings, clothing styles, facial expressions, living and working customs, as well as the usual inter-personal relationships. (In our experiment one student, who had no TV, made a number of the same observations from just looking at comics which had been made by the TV-viewing students.) Sections from Japanese children's comic books can be duplicated and passed out for students to do observation (not comprehension) homework on. These will not only be

helpful to the student, but the native Japanese teacher may be shocked at what Americans think of Japanese cartoon themes and styles! Class time need not be spent on this, though at the pre-college level, comics are always good interest-catchers when class motivation bogs down. There is one warning: Don't try to explain the nuances of humor or even the general point of some of the comics to any but fairly advanced students of Japanese language and culture; humor in any language is so bound to the culture that it is about the most difficult part of language to explain--or to grasp.

In addition, besides developing the student observational skills discussed here, we teachers of Japanese also need to cultivate one further thing--some sort of student objectivity. If not, our students will view everything Japanese as just "cute" or "quaint" or "strange" or, possibly, "stupid." This cultivation of empathy in our students probably begins first with the Japanese language teacher's own feelings towards his American students and their culture. For if the teacher reacts with negative value judgments towards his American students, their dress, their life styles, their ignorance of Japanese culture, or even their seeming dullness in learning Japanese, then this teacher's own negative attitude will be sensed by the students; they will in turn have difficulty accepting anything they identify with that teacher, including the Japanese language and Japanese culture he teaches. It will make no great difference whether this negative teacher happens to be a Japanese or a hakujin. When students like their teacher,

their basic attitude towards the inexplicable things they observe in the culture he represents will also be positive, perhaps even gullibly so.

Although this development of student objectivity and empathy is not my primary topic here, it is the next step to be taught after observational skills have been developed. But, just as a skilled observer who lacks empathy is either a cynic or a bigot, so also is the skilled student of Japanese who lacks cultural sensitivity nothing but an "Ugly American" who is fluent enough to get himself into trouble.

We need to develop our students' observational skills; visual materials offer us an authentic, interesting, and time-saving way to meet this need.

## APPENDIX

### Additional Student Observations

Language related observations

Bride laughs quietly, smiles with lips closed.

Men show anger with harsh vocal quality, or by talking very fast while shouting, or by using slow deliberate speech with the last few words very slow, accented, and "growled out," or by grabbing the coat or kimono collar of the person they are angry with.

Housing

Floors are straw mats.

Two kinds of papered sliding doors, one with pictures and the other just squares of white paper.

Flower arrangements are not gaudy; small enough to fit into alcove.

Architecture is symmetrical with lots of parallel lines.

Travel and transportation

Driver sits on right side of car.

Few American-made cars.

Student groups sit together in large groups on buses and trains.

Walking and standing

Stand with weight on both legs, standing straight.

Women walk with toes in, with short jerky steps, especially in kimonos.

Men show arrogance with long strides and toes pointed out at a $45^{\circ}$ angle.

Before entering someone's doorway, they bow a little.

Before leaving the presence of men, ladies bow first to the men.

Sitting

Backs are straight.

Men sit cross-legged, and may lean to one side with hand or arm on that thigh, elbow out.

Women and sometimes men kneel with their legs tucked under them rather than crossed.

Personal appearance

Not many women wear kimonos in the big cities; then mostly older women.

Kimono closes with the left side over the right.

Women's teeth were blackened in samurai times.

When father returns home, he changes into yukata but wife still has street clothes on.

Teeth are gold-capped; people cover their mouth with their hand (to hide bad teeth?).

Hold kimono sleeve when reaching.

Fan yourself with kimono sleeve when hot.

Women wear little jewelry, except hair ornaments, with kimono.

Sake drinking

Man and woman pour for each other.

They drink lots of sake; many get drunk.

The "hero" drank sake, rinsed his cup, then gave his cup to his friend and got a clean one for himself!

Eating

They use the same pot for cooking and serving.

They have a gas burner right on the table for cooking.

Vegetables are cut attractively.

Wife acts as a servant at meals and gatherings.

When eating, pick up each dish alternately, laying down both the dish and the chopsticks each time before picking up the next dish.

Clean the rice bowl of all left-over rice by pouring green tea into the bowl and drinking the tea with the rice.

Chopsticks are placed across the rice bowl when you finish, points toward the left.

A folded-up, wet hand towel is used at the table instead of a napkin.

Gestures

Call a person to come by nodding head rather than pointing or beckoning.

Women clap their hands together for service.

Shake hand sideways (not head) when denying something.

Use both hands lifted with palms forward to tell someone to wait or stop.

Women cry into kimono sleeve; men into their hand.

Formal bows are made kneeling, hands flat on the floor, fingers pointed in, elbows out, men's hands farther apart than women's.

Standing bows have head twisted, with chin to left.

When sitting, hands are clasped in lap, with left over right--even samurai men.

Giving with two hands, or with one hand under elbow of the handing arm.

Children show joy by jumping up and down and clapping.

Business and work

A bank president gives a "pep talk" to everyone before work starts for the day.

All the employees line up in the company yard and sing a company song and do exercises before starting work.

Small towels are worn around the head or neck of laboring men, cooks, etc.

Carrying

Women put things inside their obi or upper kimono.

Things are wrapped in a furoshiki cloth.

Women carry their purse or furoshiki-wrapped item nestled in one arm and held with the opposite hand.

Children and even a hospital patient were carried on someone's back.

Miscellaneous observations

Samurai kept swords beside them when eating with family, but in a scabbard when drinking sake in a shop.

Husbands are "bought" for rich female heirs.

Father approves or disapproves a marriage.

Formal reading of announcements is from vertically unrolled paper held with both arms outstretched.

Television comedy is "slapstick" rather than sophisticated.

On a travelogue program, the announcer (a man) interrupted the woman co-announcer several times, but she never interrupted him at all.

On "pop" music programs, the man master of ceremonies talks too much, while the pretty girl co-hostess says little. They look at the ground when listening to someone sing or talk. After introductions, the singers come on without saying anything. Before singing, a singer received flowers from his mother rather than a hug or kiss.

Even amateur singers and dancers don't seem self-conscious.

There is a debt system; when a person does a favor to another person, the beneficiary must return the favor some time in the future.

Penitence can be "proved" in an underworld gang by cutting off your own little finger and giving it to your gang boss.

A wife didn't apologize when she was wrong, but went to her mother's house instead; the husband begged her to return. (If she had apologized, he would have reminded her later on about how foolish she was this time, so she didn't apologize.)

They watch how a bundle of brown sticks fall in order to tell the future.

Men wore black suits to a wedding ceremony. Although some women wore colorful kimonos, other women had black dresses on.

Observations from reading comic books (without viewing TV)

Girls are wide-eyed, not slant-eyed or heavy-lidded.

Men's eyes are in a funny place, too near their noses.

Girls have pretty faces

Girls have long hair.

Girls wear knee socks.

High school students wear uniforms.

Everybody seems to be sports-minded.

When someone wears a kimono, they put their hair up on their heads.

People are always bowing.